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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8081
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000811

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DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/02/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: KHOST: DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR SHUFFLE

Classified By: PRT and Sub-National Governance Director Valerie C. Fowler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Khost Governor Hamidullah Qalandarzai announced the swap of district administrators in several districts the week of March 23. Qalandarzai indicated shortly after his January arrival in Khost that he would spend some time assessing the district administrators in Khost before making any changes. Following a meeting with PRT and maneuver battalion representatives on March 22 during which concerns about vacancies and poor performance of some administrators were discussed, Qalandarzai appears to have been spurred into action. Rather than opt for bold change, the governor did not appoint any new actors, but merely reshuffled the deck.

Bak and Dwamanda Districts Swap Administrators

¶2. (C) On March 23, Governor Qalandarzai called in several district administrators to announce changes in provincial administration. Said Ahmad Khan, the current district administrator in Bak district, will be reassigned to Dwamanda/Shamal district while Dwamanda District Administrator Latifullah (Babaker Khel) will assume duties as district administrator in his native Bak District. (Comment: The PRT views this reassignment positively. We expect Khan, known as a relatively capable administrator, can engage with local elders to resolve an on-going land dispute so that the PRT may proceed with rebuilding the Dwamanda District Center that was destroyed by an SVBIED in November 2008.) Latifullah, the brother of Khost Member of Parliament (MP) Liaquatullah (Babaker Khel), was frequently absent from Dwamanda, generally ineffective, and of questionable allegiance to the government. We raised these concerns with the governor, who noted that Latifullah's brother's position as MP would make dismissing him difficult.

Troubled Sebari District Gets Unwilling Administrator

¶3. (C) The problematic and allegedly corrupt Sebari district administrator, Gul Qasim, has been named to the vacant Nader Shah Kot position. Nader Shah Kot has been vacant since February 14, following the death of Badi Zaman who was killed (reportedly by family rivals) when his vehicle struck an IED traveling from his home in Sebari to Khost City for a liberation day celebration. Prior to his assignment in Sebari, Gul Qasim served as district administrator in Nader Shah Kot; he is known in the district and reportedly not fondly remembered. (Comment: The PRT has on-going concerns about his allegiance to GIROA and his reputation for corruption.)

¶4. (C) Haji Daulat Khan, the current district administrator of stable Mandozai District, has been named to the same post in Sebari. Haji Daulat reportedly "rejected" the appointment, but Qalandarzai told him he is a smart leader

and Qalandarzai needs him to meet with the Sebari elders and work on resolving issues in the volatile district. Haji Daulat asked the commander of the maneuver battalion, TF Steel, to intervene with the governor to get the reassignment cancelled; TF Steel declined, noting that the decision was the governor's to make.

¶5. (C) Haji Daulat has had good relations with the elders in Mandozai, and may make some headway in Sebari; however, he also has a well-earned reputation for corruption. He has a degree in engineering and owns a contracting company that has won contracts for PRT projects in the past. The poor quality of his work and obvious efforts to cut corners to increase his profit margin led to the decision of the PRT to blacklist his company from any future projects. His allegiance to the Afghan government, however, is strong.

¶6. (U) Governor Qalandarzai has not yet announced a replacement for the Mandozai sub-governorship, which now is the only district without an administrator in Khost Province. Mandozai District Center was hit by an SVBIED in late December 2008 that killed 14 third-graders, among other victims.

A One-for-One Swap in Tani and Gorbuz

¶7. (C) On March 25, the governor announced an additional change, reassigning Tani district administrator Hakim Wali to Gorbuz district, and sending Gorbuz district administrator, Mohammad Akbar, to Tani. Hakim Wali was the only district administrator native to his district in Khost and has enjoyed

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good relations with tribal elders. Governor Qalandarzai has told us on more than one occasion that he did not like a district administrator to be from the dominant tribe in the district he administers, as was the case with Hakim Wali in Tani, for fear that he may encounter conflicts of interest. (We note that the governor overcame his scruples by assigning Latifullah (Babaker Khel) to his native Bak district.) We stressed that Hakim Wali was one of the more capable and effective district administrators in Khost. Qalandarzai rejoined that Hakim Wali is not a strong leader and must be moved.⁸ We do not share the governor's opinion of Hakim Wali's leadership abilities, but expect he will prove effective in Gorbuz in time.

Comment

¶8. (C) While we consider some of Qalandarzai's assignments favorably and others less so, we are encouraged to see him engaging in the business of running Khost Province following his recent prolonged absence from the province. However, Qalandarzai missed an opportunity to make a decisive change in provincial governance by opting to reassign, rather than dismiss, ineffective district administrators such as Gul Qasim and Latifullah (Babaker Khel). Shuffling district officials, some of whom have built constructive relationships with community leaders, as the fighting season in Khost swings into full gear is a risky move. It remains to be seen if his actions will enable him to build a team that allows him to put a positive mark on Khost governance. Additionally, it is not clear whether the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), which is responsible for selecting and transferring district administrators, approved or was aware of the Governor's reassignment of district administrators.

¶9. (U) This cable has been reviewed by PRT Khost Acting Commanding Officer LTC Pablo Manzo, TF Steel Commander LTC Stephen Smith, and TF Yukon Regional Advisor Kelly Degnan. WOOD